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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EUN](#) [NATO](#) [HR](#) [YI](#) [BK](#) [OSCE](#)
REGIONAL ISSUES
SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAN FRIED'S MEETINGS WITH
CROATIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert A. Bradtke for reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: EUR Assistant Secretary Daniel Fried met April 5 with Croatian PM Sanader, President Mesic, and FM Grabar-Kitarovic to exchange views on Croatia's NATO aspirations, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and other regional issues.

2.(U) A/S Fried and Ambassador met April 5 with PM Ivo Sanader, who was accompanied by MFA State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic and Chief of Staff Bianka Matkovic; President Stjepan Mesic, who was accompanied by Foreign Policy Advisors Tomislav Jakic and Ana Simundza, Defense Advisor Vlatko Cvrtila, EU Advisor Anica Djamic, and spokesperson Danijela Barisic; and FM Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, who was accompanied by Deputy Chief of Staff Ana Brncic. DCM and Polcouns took notes.

Croatia's NATO Aspirations

¶3. (C) A/S Fried praised GOC efforts to prepare for NATO membership, confirming USG support for a NATO invitation at the 2008 Summit in Bucharest. PM Sanader said his October 2006 meeting with President Bush was of "historic importance" to Croatia and the region. Leaders of Adriatic Charter partners Albania and Macedonia had called him after the Washington visit to offer their congratulations and note that the President's commitment to Croatia on NATO was a good sign for their countries as well. Sanader noted Croatia's strong support for NATO membership for Albania and Macedonia, pointing out that the prospect of membership would give politicians in those countries the cover they needed to take tough political decisions. Adriatic Charter country membership in NATO would have a salutary effect on Serbia as well, he said, by demonstrating that European aspirations were not out of reach for countries of the Balkans. A/S Fried replied that Macedonia and Albania have a lot of progress yet to make before Alliance members will consider them to be strong candidates.

¶4. (C) Sanader also explained the organization of the "State Commission on NATO," led by him, President Mesic, and parliament Speaker Seks, but also including senior officials of opposition parties. The goal of the commission is to keep all the parties together on a positive position regarding Croatia's NATO membership (as well as its deployment to Afghanistan) and try to prevent it from becoming a divisive issue in this year's election campaign. He also noted that the Croatian constitution would not require the country to have a referendum on joining NATO, although it would have to hold one to accede to the European Union. Sanader also said that Croatia's EU membership process was going well.

¶5. (C) FM Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic noted that the "good news" on NATO helped to bolster public support for membership. A/S

Fried asked that Croatia help "push" Macedonia and Albania forward along the path to NATO, but emphasized that the other two members of the A-3 would not hold Croatia back. FM Grabar-Kitarovic expressed willingness to be helpful, including reaching out to A-3 observers Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro, and pointed out that Croatia will take on the rotating A-3 chairmanship in the second half of 2007.

¶16. (C) President Mesic thanked A/S Fried for USG support for NATO membership. He noted that there were still NATO skeptics in Croatia, most of whom were frightened that membership would lead them into unwanted military operations.

The GOC had not done a good enough job explaining to the public what NATO was all about, he said, but was seriously engaged on that issue now. Public opinion on NATO will continue to improve.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

¶17. (C) A/S Fried noted that he had seen Republika Srpska PM Milorad Dodik that day and told him in no uncertain terms that there should be no referendum on RS independence. Dodik had agreed. Dodik's main concern was that the USG not agree to BiH Presidency member Haris Silajdzic's desire to abolish the RS. On Kosovo, Dodik had said he supported the Ahtisaari plan on final status, promising to recognize Kosovo's independence if there were a UNSC resolution to that effect. A/S Fried also noted his dissatisfaction with Silajdzic's views on Srebrenica and nationalism, as well as his wish to tear up Dayton and start over.

¶18. (C) Sanader said he had met Silajdzic the week before in BiH; Silajdzic is an old-fashioned politician who seems to be

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"living in the 1990's," he said; he wants other countries to solve Bosnia's problems. Sanader also pointed out that Silajdzic had repudiated a deal Croatia had worked out with Terzic, his predecessor, on the proposed Peljesac bridge connecting the two sections of continental Croatia that are separated by a thin strip of BiH.

¶19. (C) On BiH constitutional reform, A/S Fried said that the USG still supports the April 2006 package as a good place to start. But the USG will not impose something - there has to be Bosnian ownership of the constitution so Bosnian politicians will have to work it all out themselves; this will be a long, hard slog.

¶110. (C) Sanader noted the importance of Bosnian Croats to the stability of BiH; it is strategically important for Croatia, BiH, and the USG to keep the Bosnian Croats in their country, so their position needs to be strengthened. If Bosnia's future is unclear, the Croats will emigrate to Croatia, especially once it is a member of the EU, causing problems for both countries and raising the risk of partitioning BiH between the RS and the Bosniaks and creating a potentially dangerous Islamic state in the heart of Europe; some thousand mujahedeen had remained in BiH after the war. Mesic expressed a similar concern.

¶111. (C) Sanader described his efforts to get the two main Bosnian Croat parties to reunite and settle their policy differences, since their division diluted Croat political power. He promised to work with the USG in exercising his influence with the Bosnian Croats and asked for USG support to strengthen their political position in BiH. A/S Fried agreed that the Bosnian Croats were an important factor in BiH and noted his satisfaction that Sanader was not seeking a third entity for the Croats.

¶112. (C) FM Grabar-Kitarovic emphasized that Croatia wants BiH to sign the SAA but expressed concern about a slowdown in necessary reforms. A/S Fried asserted that police reform continues to be a firm condition for the SAA. The FM noted

that the GOC is prepared to assist Bosnian Croats in returning to and rebuilding their pre-war homes. A/S Fried suggested that the Bosnian Croats need to feel that the GOC is not "their only friend" and suggested that the USG could play a helpful intermediary role if the Bosnian Croats would convey their concerns also to U.S. representatives in BiH.

¶13. (C) Sanader expressed concern about the level of Russian company and government investment in BiH and the region as a whole, giving A/S Fried a nonpaper on the subject (faxed to EUR/SCE). A/S Fried shared Sanader's concern, noted that DAS Matt Bryza, who had been in Zagreb a few days previously, is in charge of promoting a southern energy corridor that would provide an alternative to Gazprom, and said that Croatian regulatory agencies would have to be sure any Russian investment in the country was above-board and transparent.

Kosovo

¶14. (C) A/S Fried said his main motivation for coming to the region at this time was to consult on Kosovo and make clear our position on Ahtisaari's final status plan. The U.S. and the EU will remain in Kosovo to protect the Kosovar Serbs. It is too soon to tell if Russia would really veto a UNSC resolution on Kosovo final status. In any case, the USG is seized with the issue, is resolute, and will not let the situation drift; time is not on our side so we must act promptly. Resolving the issue with Russia may take personal interventions by President Bush and Chancellor Merkel with President Putin. A/S Fried commented, it was a good sign that the Kosovar parliament had overwhelmingly endorsed the Ahtisaari plan, since it meant the radicals had been marginalized. A/S Fried also noted that Kosovar Serbs had begun to express differences with Belgrade on important issues; unfortunately Belgrade was not allowing them to make agreements that could improve their lives. It is important to give Belgrade a European perspective; Tadic gets this, Kostunica does not, A/S Fried observed.

¶15. (C) Mesic said that Kosovo was an issue for the whole region; it could only progress through implementation of Ahtisaari's plan. Serbia will have a hard time coping with Kosovo's loss due to three-hundred-year-old myths, but it will have to accept Kosovo's independence in the end. We need to focus on ensuring that the new architecture in Kosovo is right and that national minorities will be protected. One problem is that Serbian PM Kostunica is a true Serb nationalist, unlike Milosevic, who only used nationalism to gain and maintain power. Tadic, on the other hand, is a

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democrat, and thinks like we do.

Regional Issues

¶16. (C) Mesic noted that regional cooperation is in general very good, even with Serbia. He credited the ICTY with helping to individualize guilt for war crimes committed during the 1990's, which made it easier for Croatia to reconcile with Serbia. FM Grabar-Kitarovic asserted that full compliance with the ICTY must remain a condition before Serbia or BiH take the next steps toward Euro-Atlantic integration; A/S Fried agreed, reiterating that neither country would be allowed to proceed with a NATO Membership action Plan until more progress had been made.

Croatia's OSCE Mission

¶17. (C) Sanader gave A/S Fried a brief nonpaper (faxed to EUR/SCE) asking for USG support to close the OSCE Mission in Croatia.

Other Issues

¶18. (U) Sanader invited A/S Fried to attend the July 6-7 conference on NATO in Dubrovnik.

¶19. (U) A/S Fried has approved this cable.
BRADTKE